Statement

Of

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Chairman Cuellar, Ranking Member Dent, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Marko Bourne and I serve as Director of Policy and Program Analysis at the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). I appreciate the opportunity to appear today before the Committee to discuss the status of mutual aid, credentialing and typing of the Nation's first responders.

In my testimony today, I will outline how we are working to develop a common credentialing standard, the framework of our credentialing and typing programs, how this relates to strengthening mutual aid, and how we intend to move forward in addressing this important issue in our response community. I would also like to make sure that I state for the record that credentialing first responders is the right of the local community and that FEMA and the Department in no way wishes this effort to encroach upon that right, but instead assist them in their efforts both now and into the future to develop nationwide credentialing standards. FEMA will not be issuing credentials to state and local personnel; that will remain a state and local responsibility as it always has been.

Background

The need for a standard process to enable first responders to move rapidly to different jurisdictions, and to validate the identity and professional qualifications of responders who arrive on the scene of an emergency or disaster, is a long standing issue. Creating a credentialing and typing standard arises from this need to ensure that the Incident Commander and those in other response leadership roles know who is present at an incident site, and their qualifications. Lessons learned from past disasters have indicated

that it is often difficult for local officials to know who is qualified to do what, and who may be an immediate asset to the situation among the multitude of volunteers or entities that arrive. Additionally, examples of people posing as firefighters, police officers, doctors or rescue specialists are well documented in every major disaster, and further underscore the need for further measures to provide the Incident Commander with greater assurance that those who respond, whether asked or not, can be verified, validated and utilized.

Since the creation of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) in 2003 and the development of the NIMS Integration Center, now the Incident Management Systems Division (IMSD), there have been programs developed to address this need, using a multi-jurisdictional, shared approach to develop a common standard available to all response partners. Congress has also recognized this necessity by passing legislation to provide authorization for FEMA to develop this standard and to continue our resource typing and mutual aid efforts. We are looking to best practices by leveraging existing methodologies, such as the Federal Information Processing Standard (FIPS) 201, which is approved by the National Institute of Standards and Technology. This non-proprietary standard, issued in response to Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12, establishes a common process and technology for sharing secure personnel identification and achieving interoperability across multiple jurisdictions.

Developing a Standard

Title IV of the "Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007" (9/11 Act) directs the Administrator of FEMA to set standards for credentialing and typing Federal personnel who are likely to respond to a natural disaster, act of terrorism, or other man-made disaster. This is an enormous task and responsibility and FEMA will be working with the Test and Evaluation and Standards Division of the Science and Technology Directorate to ensure the approach will encompass the attributes of openness, balance of interest, due process, and consensus that are the hallmarks of a credible standards development process.

As such, FEMA is in the process of developing a common standard utilizing existing programs, standards and accredited sources including the National Incident Management System, National Response Framework, National Infrastructure Protection Plan, National Emergency Management Association, National Fire Protection Association, Emergency Management Accreditation Program, and American National Standards Institute. The representative organizations are key partners and well-respected members of the emergency management community. The standards and programs of these plans, systems and organizations have been vetted and endorsed by a wide range of disciplines, and provide a solid foundation for this effort.

Credentialing and Typing Program

Significant progress on the technology of credentialing has already been made. FEMA's efforts beyond the resource typing and standards efforts of the IMSD programs have been expanded through the auspices of our National Capital Region Coordination (NCRC)

office just recently transferred to FEMA. The National Capital Region faces challenges based on multiple jurisdictions and authorities that require clarification; one of those is the need for rapid coordination between Federal, State, and local responders across jurisdictions while validating the identity and professional qualifications of those responders. Although the individual jurisdictions maintain and retain ownership of their credentialing and typing information, that information nevertheless needs to be shared among jurisdictions through a common technology standard. In 2004, DHS, DoD, and the National Capital Region (NCR) jurisdictions sought to overcome this challenge by leveraging FIPS 201 and corresponding off-the-shelf commercially available equipment. NCRC is the nexus for this coordination effort in its day-to-day interaction with Federal, State, local, private sector, and non-profit partners in the NCR. NCRC is working closely with these partners to test the concepts, methodology, and process while gaining invaluable feedback directly from its constituents in order to enhance the program for potential use by a larger audience. By leveraging and assessing these efforts, the NCR becomes a national pilot, allowing us to test some basic assumptions about credentialing and resource typing in a responder environment. The results of these efforts will be known later this year and will assist us in the validation of a standard that can be adopted nationally.

The credentialing and typing process requires an objective, standardized evaluation and documentation of an individual's qualifications, called attributes, and ability to meet nationally-accepted minimum standards to provide particular services or functions during

an incident. The standard can help to ensure that personnel with the right attributes are deployed to the right place at the right time, thus reducing response and recovery times.

With respect to credentialing, again the intent of FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security is not to issue identification cards to all State and local first responders or others. That responsibility lies with State and local governments or the jurisdiction having appropriate authority. The aforementioned FIPS 201 standard describes what the credential should be to represent identity validation. We are working on the subsequent component – the aspect that says here is who I am in the professional community and these are my skills – and how that information is securely shared and verified on scene.

We are utilizing the Emergency Support Function construct of the National Response Framework, as well as the National Infrastructure Protection Plan sectors, to identify those professional attributes (e.g., paramedic, emergency room physician, hazardous materials technician) that have a professional authority standing behind these designations for its personnel. In other words, we are leveraging existing certification processes to "substantiate" the qualifications of personnel. This will provide the cornerstone and structure to allow our State and local partners to engage in this process, in coordination with existing jurisdictional priorities and funding streams.

Deployment of the credentialing and typing process requires the development of common data models and role-based access management framework for protecting the integrity and security of the underlying data. We have also initiated efforts with the Test and Evaluation and Standards Division of the Science and Technology Directorate and the

National Institute of standards and Technology to develop these data models and associated access management framework.

Strengthening Mutual Aid

A process that standardizes personnel identification and skill set verification directly enhances the capability for multi-jurisdictional resource sharing and mutual aid. This credentialing and typing effort supports FEMA's integrated National Mutual Aid and Resource Management System to enhance the functionality of interstate and intrastate mutual aid. All incidents require the use of the Incident Command System (ICS) which is the backbone of the National Incident Management System. ICS provides a flexible core mechanism for coordinated and collaborative incident management and integrates facilities, equipment, personnel, and communications operating within a common organizational structure. A credentialing/typing standard will help make execution of mutual aid agreements more streamlined by offering a quick, effective, and reliable method for verifying individuals and their respective qualifications.

Program Plan

FEMA is establishing a program plan to implement a common, non-proprietary approach, including:

- An identity assurance standard;

- Credentialing/typing standards for personnel skill sets/qualifications; and

- A common process/technology standard that integrates both.

The resulting aggregated standard will be used on a limited basis during the NCR portion of the National Level Exercise (NLE) 2-08 taking place in April 2008. The intent is to test the standard using a federated model where information is controlled and maintained by the respective entities, not by FEMA. This is a "system of systems" in a sense, as FEMA will not own the information; participating jurisdictions retain ownership of their information. This concept, if validated, could be made available in other parts of the country, and potentially will allow for real-time and post-event electronic validation of on-scene personnel. The standard also could enable a mobile credentialing process at the incident scene to ensure multi-jurisdictional mutual aid capability.

Important milestones have been established to address Title IV of the 9/11 Act, among others. These include development of credentialing and typing guidelines and objectives, with written guidance to Federal agencies that have responsibilities under the National Response Framework, and participation in an exercise by Federal agencies within the NCR to determine the effectiveness of the guidelines and objectives. In addition, FEMA intends to provide ongoing expertise and technical assistance to aid emergency management stakeholders with credentialing and resource typing, and completion of credentialing and typing standards for our Federal, State, local, tribal, private sector, and non-profit partners.

Conclusion

In summary, FEMA is making great strides in developing a credentialing and typing standard for use by responders across jurisdictions. The program plan we have outlined

puts FEMA in a position to meet the objectives and milestones of Title IV of the 9/11 Act, and promotes mutual aid and standardized multi-jurisdictional interoperability. Timely and effective emergency response to a disaster rests on the proper establishment and verification of personnel identity, skills, and abilities. The implementation of a credentialing and typing system using common, non-proprietary standards will support and facilitate intrastate and interstate initiatives, and have the further benefit of addressing issues of self-dispatching personnel and scene control.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify and am prepared to answer any questions you may have.